

BUSINESS

Annual book by Nader-founded group gives vehicle ratings

Safety

Continued from page B7

guide was killed by the Reagan administration, Gillis began working with the Center for Auto Safety and publishing it privately.

The book also lists the vehicles based on the number of consumer complaints filed with the federal government and the number of vehicles sold. The vehicles with the fewest complaints per models sold were the Ford F-Series pickup truck, BMW 3 Series and BMW 5 Series. The vehicles with the most complaints were the Mazda MPV minivan, Kia Sportage SUV and

Ford Excursion SUV.

While the Ford F-Series is the only recommended standard-sized pickup truck, the two BMW models are not rated. That is because there were no government crash tests done on either car. Gillis said the crash test is so important in determining whether a car is safe that the book does not rate any vehicle that hasn't been tested.

The federal government has increased the number of cars it crashes to see how well they hold up in accidents.

On the Net:

A list of all recommended vehicles is available at http://www.wire.ap.org

Center for Auto Safety: www.autosafety.org

Consumer confidence rises, beating January expectations

Conference Board chief says worst of economic downturn may be over

By LISI de BOURBON The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Consumer confidence improved for the second consecutive month in January, lifted by increased optimism about jobs and the economy.

The New York-based Conference Board said today that its Consumer Confidence Index rose to 97.3 this month from a revised 94.6 in December. Analysts were expecting a reading of 96.

The industry group's index, based on a monthly survey of some 5,000 U.S. households, is closely watched because consumer confidence drives consumer spending, which accounts for about two-thirds of the nation's economic activity.

"While the economy has not turned around yet, the worst may well be over," said Lynn Franco, director of the Conference Board's Consumer Research Center.

Franco said the upturn in confidence was driven by the feeling that the business outlook and job prospects are going to get better.

The index compares results to its base year, 1985, when it stood at 100. The November figure was the lowest since February 1994, when it reached 79.9.

Earlier today, the Commerce Department reported that orders to U.S. factories for costly goods rose a bigger-than-expected 2 percent in December, suggesting the nation's battered manufacturing sector is beginning to emerge from a 17-month slump.

Both reports suggested that better days lie ahead for the economy, which officially slipped into recession in March.

To keep the economy afloat, the Federal Reserve cut interest rates 11 times last year, helping to push the prime lending rate, a benchmark for many consumer and business loans, to its lowest level since November 1965.

Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan told Congress last week that he sees signs of a recovery,

prompting many analysts to predict that Fed policy-makers will leave interest rates unchanged after a two-day meeting that begins today.

The Conference Board said consumers' assessment of the current economic climate was mixed. Consumers rating business conditions as good increased to 18.4 percent from 17.3 percent in December, but those who felt conditions were bad rose to 22.4 percent from 21.7 percent.

Nonetheless, Americans are still feeling optimistic about their economic prospects for the next six months. The percentage of consumers who expect business conditions to improve climbed to 25 percent from 22.2 percent in December, the report said.

Consumers' outlook about jobs also improved, with 18.8 percent expecting more jobs to open up in the next six months, compared to 18.5 in December. Those expecting fewer jobs dipped to 18.2 percent from 19.3 percent.

The Conference Board is a nonprofit research and business group.

Weyerhaeuser, Willamette sign pact to merge

The Associated Press

FEDERAL WAY, Wash. — Timber giant Weyerhaeuser Co. has signed a definitive agreement to buy Willamette Industries Inc. for \$6.1 billion.

In a statement released late Monday night, Weyerhaeuser said it would pay \$55.50 a share for Willamette and assume \$1.7 billion in debt.

In trading Monday on the New York Stock Exchange, shares of Willamette were up 4 cents to \$55.20, and Weyerhaeuser was up \$2.76 to \$59.56.

The two companies agreed last week to merge. The deal was resisted for years by the Willamette board of directors, led by Chairman William Swindells Jr., grandson of a company co-founder.

Weyerhaeuser's chairman, Steven Rogel, was a former Willamette employee whom Swindells had groomed to take over as chief executive officer in 1995. But Rogel left in 1997 to become Weyerhaeuser's chairman. Rogel immediately offered to buy his old company after taking control of Weyerhaeuser, but Swindells and the Willamette board kept rejecting his overtures.

UAB ad exhibit barks back to days when 'More Doctors Smoked Camels'

Stained

Continued from page B7

cited side-by-side 1940s sales pitches claiming that Camels stimulate digestion and make meals taste better while Lucky Strikes help smokers lose weight. He called today's current cigarette advertising even worse.

"One ad currently running claims their cigarette is noncarcinogenic. That's 100 percent deceptive," Blum said. "The deception hasn't stopped."

Today, Blum said, advertisers are pushing low-tar cigarettes and 95 percent of people who smoke today are buying low tar.

"The fact is, (low tar cigarettes) have no benefit whatsoever over the old nonfiltered camels. In many ways they're

worse," he said, because people smoke more of them to get the nicotine they crave. "So to advertise low tar is just as deceptive as what we saw in the '40s. It's pure hokum, pure consumer fraud."

In defense of the advertising industry, both now and then, David Driscoll with Huntsville's Durham Advertising said the mass media gave advertisers plenty of help back in the '30s and '40s.

"Nobody knew back then that cigarettes were bad for you, or they didn't want to believe it. Back then, it was cool to smoke," Driscoll said. "Even Ricky and Lucy and Andy Griffith on Mayberry smoked."

Driscoll said after the surgeon general's report linking smoking to cancer in the 1960s, advertisers had to step up their campaigns.

"The electronic media started selling it with sex, like the Marlboro man. Then they came out with the skinny little cigarette to get the women, then they started going after the teens," he said. "Basically, smokers are in a state of denial and anytime they see a positive message with cigarettes it's an excuse for them to say 'Hey, it's OK to smoke.'"

So, does the advertising industry have a responsibility to not take tobacco clients? Driscoll said an ad agency's basic job is to take a product's message and try to reach the market.

"If a tobacco company walked in and handed you a \$30 million account, it would be hard to turn it down," said Driscoll, whose agency isn't currently doing tobacco ads. "But you could say we need to address the fact it can cause cancer and

death. Enjoy Brand X, but be responsible when you smoke. That's a good compromise. It's free enterprise and free speech. If one turns it down somebody else will pick it up. You don't shoot the messenger."

Blum, however, has another suggestion. "If they've got to push cigarettes, let them walk around with a sandwich board. No magazine or newspaper..." he said.

Blum has other collections featuring Santa Claus and smoking ads, women and smoking, and sports figures and smoking. For questions or comments or to see Blum's collection, call him in Tuscaloosa at 205-348-2887. For information about the Birmingham exhibit call 205-934-8934.

MONDAY'S CLOSING PRICES

Table with columns: Price, Change, Company Name, Price, Change. Includes companies like Adtran Inc, Alabama Nat'l Bncp, Alfa Corp, etc.

COMPANIES WITH AREA OPERATIONS

Table with columns: Price, Change, Company Name, Price, Change. Includes companies like AMR Corporation, Alamo Group Inc, Allegheny Tech, etc.

FOREIGN MARKETS

Table with columns: Last, Change, Percent, Last, Change, Percent for various markets like Frankfurt DAX, FT-SE 100, etc.

COMMODITIES

FUTURES

Table with columns: Exch, Contract, Settle, Chg. Lists futures for Corn, Wheat, Soybeans, etc.

SPOT PRECIOUS METALS

Table with columns: Metal, Price. Lists Silver and Gold.

FOREIGN CURRENCIES

Table with columns: Exch, Contract, Settle, Chg. Lists Japanese Yen, Mexican Peso, etc.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

Table with columns: Exch, Contract, Settle, Chg. Lists Argent Peso, Australia Dollar, etc.

TREASURIES

Table with columns: Exch, Contract, Settle, Chg. Lists 2-Yr Treasury, 5-Yr Treasury, etc.



HOW TO READ THE MARKET IN REVIEW

Here are the 525 most active stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, the 400 most active on the Nasdaq National Markets and 100 most active on American Stock Exchange. Mutual funds are 1,115 largest. Stocks in bold changed 5 percent or more in price. Underlined stocks are the most active. \*Stocks of local interest.

Name: Stocks are listed alphabetically by the company's full name (not its abbreviation). Company names made up of initials appear at the beginning of each letter's list.

Div: Current annual dividend rate paid on stock, based on latest quarterly or semiannual declaration, unless otherwise footnoted.

Last: Price stock was trading at when exchange closed for the day.

Chg: Loss or gain for the day. No change indicated by ... mark.

Fund Name: Name of mutual fund and family.

Sell: Net asset value, or price at which fund could be sold.

Chg: Daily net change in the NAV.

Stock Footnotes: cc - PE greater than 99. dd - Loss in last 12 mos. d - New 52-wk low during trading day. g - Dividend in Canadian \$. Stock price in U.S. \$. n - New issue in past 52 wks. q - Closed-end mutual fund; no PE calculated. s - Split or stock dividend of 25 pct or more in last 52 wks. Div begins with date of split or stock dividend. u - New 52-wk low during trading day. v - Trading halted on primary market.

Unless noted, dividend rates are annual disbursements based on last declaration. pf - Preferred. pp - Holder owes installment(s) of purchase price. rt - Rights. un - Units. wd - When distributed. wf - When issued. wt - Warrants. wv - With warrants. xw - Without warrants.

Conference brings together small business, government and corporations

Use

Continued from page B7

search, require a business to form a partnership with a university, Illa said.

The conference is designed to give entrepreneurs a chance to meet representatives from the military, NASA, National Science Foundation and other agencies as well as such companies as Teledyne Brown Engineering, Boeing and Raytheon.

Sessions covered in the conference include how to incorporate a business, patent law, finding money for research and how to partner with the public and private sector.

Entrepreneurs also can learn

how they can get support through BizTech, Huntsville's high-tech business incubator. Startup firms that are accepted into the incubator get advice and mentoring from local business people who have experienced the ups and downs of running a new company.

This can help lessen the stress involved in launching a new firm, said Joanne Randolph, executive director of Biz-Tech.

"There are a lot of successful entrepreneurs in this community who are willing to give back," she said. "Sometimes (entrepreneurs) are so busy working in the business that they have no time to step back and work on the business."

Advertisement for Linda M. Dinerman, M.D. Board Certified in Adolescent Medicine. Includes photo and contact info.

Advertisement for Subaru. 'We Do Subaru.' (The beauty of all wheel drive!). Features a photo of a Subaru SUV and contact information for Madison Square Imports.

Advertisement for a health care office. 'Specializing in health care of young people 10-23 years'. You may call now 534-4114 to schedule an appointment. (Afternoon Hours Available on Tuesday & Wednesday).